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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of several independent variables in predicting the perception of television's content as real. The relationship between the perception of television violence as real and agressive predispositions of young viewers was analyzed. Two hundred seventy-three Mexican children in the third and sixth grades in Mexico City were administered questionnaires testing hypotheses with respect to 11 independent variables as predictors of the perception of reality of television: real life experience with television content, socioeconomic status, grade in school, age, sex, grade point average, the use of television for relaxation, learning and companionship, exposure, and the influence of television increased with the use of television for learning and companionship, with general TV exposure, and with the influence of others; as the referent for television became more abstract, the children tended to perceive television as more realistic; and the perception of the reality of television violence did not correlate consistently with two different measures of aggressive predisposition. (Author/TS)

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# THE PERCEIVED REALITY OF TELEVISION AND AGGRESSIVE PREDISPOSITIONS AMONG CHILDREN IN MEXICO

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ABSTRACT

THE PERCEIVED REALITY OF TELEVISION AND AGGRESSIVE

PREDISPOSITIONS AMONG CHILDREN IN MEXICO

The present study was carried out in Mexico City in order to assess the effectiveness of several independent variables in predicting the perception of television content as real. A further step was taken in the theoretical sequence of media effects, by analyzing the relationship between the perception of television violence as real and aggressive predispositions of young viewers.

Two hundred and seventy three Mexican children in the third and sixth grades of elementary schools in Mexico City were administered questionnaires in the Spring of 1975. Eleven hypotheses were tested with respect to eleven independent variables as predictors of the perception of reality of television. The independent variables were: real life experiences with television content, socioeconomic status, grade in school, age, sex, GPA, the use of television for relaxation, learning and companionship, exposure, and the influence of significant others. A twelfth hypothesis was concerned with the perception of reality of television at three different levels of abstraction: T.V. in general, content areas of T.V., and six specific characters, groups of characters or behaviors on specific television shows. The final hypothesis predicted that as the perception of reality of television increased, aggressive predispositions in young viewers would also increase.

It was found that: 1) The perception of reality of television increased with: the use of television for learning and companionship, general T.V. exposure, and with the influence of significant others, 2) The perception of reality of television decreased as socioeconomic status, grade in school, age, and GPA increased; 3) No consistent relationship was found between the perception of television reality with real life experiences, the use of television for relaxation, specific T.V. exposure, or the sex of the viewers; 4) Contrary to the hypothesis proposed, as the referent for television became more abstract the children tended to perceive television as more realistic; 5) The perception of reality of television violence did not correlate consistently with two different measures of aggressive predispositions; 6) For those children high in the perception of reality of television violence there was not a consistent relationship between exposure to television violence and aggressive predispositions; and 7) By means of multiple regression analysis it was found that the best predictors of the perception of T.V. reality were the influence of significant others, grade in school and age, and to a lesser extent GPA and the use of T.V. for companionship.

The results of this study were compared with results encountered in research conducted with American children. Some tentative explanations were offered for the differences and similarities found. It was concluded that, among other things, further research should analyze more closely the different referents on television; the sources of experience that the child uses for evaluating what he sees on the screen; the dimensions on which the reality of television is evaluated, if at all; other variables that may precede or interact with the perception of reality of television; other possible effects of the perception of T.V. as realistic; and the exploration of factors that might be responsible for intercultural differences. An analysis over time of the effects of the perception of reality of television and other variables, such as exposure, on attitudes and behavior was suggested.

# THE PERCEIVED REALITY OF TELEVISION AND AGGRESSIVE PREDISPOSITIONS AMONG CHILDREN IN MEXICO

The purpose of this study is to try to examine the relationship between several predictor variables and the perception of television as real, and the link between the perception of reality of television (PRTV hereafter) violence and aggressive predispositions in young Mexican viewers.

The possible role of PRTV in mediating effects on the behavior or attitudes of young viewers is a relatively new concern which should be addressed from the perspective of its determinants, and from the point of view of its consequences.

Reeves (1974) addressed the question of the determinants of the perception of TV programming as real in American children, and he found some evidence for the explanation of the phenomenon: 1) As questions with respect to PRTV move from abstract to more specific, the child tends to report more perception of reality; 2) the influence of significant others of a child was found to be positively related to PRTV; 3) as age decreased, PRTV increased; 4) as exposure to TV increased, PRTV increased; and 5) as the use of TV for relaxation, learning, and companionship increased, PRTV increased. He failed to confirm hypotheses with respect to the relationship of PRTV with real life experiences, socioeconomic status, intelligence, and sex.

The present study attempts (1) to replicate the relationships for which Reeves found support; (2) to present a new test, explanations and modifications for the relationships for which Reeves didn't find support; and (3) to introduce aggressive predispositions as the criterion variable directly affected by the PRTV of violence. All these are examined in a different sociocultural setting, namely Mexico City.

CORRELATES OF PRTV

Real life experiences with television content. Symbolic or, in this case, television experiences, and "real life" experiences can be assumed to be cognitively evaluated against each other, when both are available. There is substantial evidence that indicates that TV representations are quite selective in general (Gerbner, 1972; Dominick, 1973; Clark and Blankenburg, 1972). However, Reeves did not find support for his hypothesis that as real life experiences with TV content increased, PRTV would decrease.

It could be argued that in fact real life experiences may counteract the stereotyping effect of the media up to a certain point, but then, when real life experiences are very large and varied in number, TV representations may then fit, in individual instances, that which is known in real life. This leads us to tentatively state that as real experiences with television content increase, stereotyping will decrease, but that PRTV will follow a curvilinear pattern as follows:

$H_1$: As real life experiences with TV content increase up to a middle range point, PRTV will decrease, and as real life experiences with TV content increase any further, PRTV will also increase.

Level of abstraction of the referent on TV with respect to PRTV. Reeves found that the more concrete the referent for television content the more the child identified such content as reflecting real life. So, for example, the child could more precisely evaluate a specific character than TV in general. This finding is consistent with a general pattern of findings in related research (Greenberg and Dominick, 1969; Dominick and Greenberg, 1970; Greenberg, 1972; Atkin, 1971; and Ward, 1972. See Reeves, 1974, for a graphic summary on

p. 8). When children were asked to respond to items such as "People on TV are pretty much like people I meet in real life," and "The same things happen to people on TV happen to me in real life," they typically answer slightly below or on the middle, or not sure, part of the scale.

This general pattern of findings makes sense since one would expect children, or respondents in general, to find it easier to evaluate TV content as real or not real as the referent becomes more concrete. Accordingly, it is to be expected that

$H_2$: Children will perceive specific television characters or events to be more real than content areas of television programming and the content areas to be more real than television in general.

Demographics. Demographic variables can be expected to contribute to PRTV by reflecting the degree and type of socialization that the child undergoes.

Socioeconomic Status (SES). Reeves hypothesized that "as socioeconomic status increases, PRTV will decrease," and he didn't find support. He points out "that the inability of SES to predict PRTV could possibly be a function of the lack of variance obtained in its measure. Past studies reporting significant findings used economically well defined samples from different geographical areas." Among such past studies one can count Hanneman's (1972), Greenberg's (1972), and Greenberg and Dominick's (1969 and 1968).

One can expect PRTV to correlate negatively with SES since it has been repeatedly found that low SES children tend to use the media, and especially television as an important source of information (Feeley, 1974). Greenberg and Reeves (1974, p. 6) point out that

> "The typical explanation advanced for SES differences in PRTV judgements has been the more restricted opportunities for both alternative personal and communication experiences among the less advantaged youngsters."

On these bases the following hypothesis is stated:

$H_3$: As SES increases, PRTV will decrease.

Age. Lyle and Hoffman (1972, p. 175) found that

> "Sixth graders appeared to be considerably advanced over the first graders in rejecting television as an accurate reflection of life, and there was a further increase reflected among the tenth graders."

Greenberg (1974) found in his British study that as the child grew older, his PRTV decreased, and Reeves found that in general as age increased, PRTV decreased with the exception of PRTV among black children.

Reeves operationalized age as the grade in school of the children. In the Mexican study, given some more variability of ages within grades, especially in the low SES schools, both measures will be obtained and the same relationship is hypothesized for the two of them:

$H_4$: As grade in school increases, PRTV will decrease.

$H_4'$: Age age increases, PRTV will decrease.

Sex. Dominick and Greenberg (1970) found some evidence for the notion that girls perceive television as more realistic than boys. Reeves didn't find support for this relationship. While he didn't offer a rationale for this finding, it is possible to think in terms of socialization practices (Mischel, 1970). Boys and girls in the U.S., across different socioeconomic statuses, ages, and other structural characteristics, can be conceived of as having more similar experiences than boys or girls in a country like Mexico, given the larger emphasis that the American society puts on equal opportunities and rights for both sexes. Mexico, following more traditional patterns of child rearing practices, provides differential opportunities for socialization outside of the home for boys and girls. With the girls spending much more time at home where the TV is. Consequently,

$H_5$: Females will perceive television programming to be more real than males.

Grade Point Average (GPA). Reeves hypothesized that as intelligence increased, PRTV would decrease. He found little support for his hypothesis, but he observed that consistently high I.Q. scores rendered the highest PRTV means. In this study I.Q. scores could not be collected but the GPA's of the children were available. Since I.Q. scores and GPA's are usually highly intercorrelated, we may expect that,

$H_6$: As GPA increases, PRTV will decrease.

Functions and Gratifications From Television Viewing. The analysis of the functions that the media serve to their audience has been a topic of recent concern (Blumler and Katz, 1974).

Past research has emphasized the importance of the functions that television serves (Greenberg and Dominick, 1969; Greenberg, 1974; Reeves, 1974; etc.).

Arising from one of Greenberg's studies (1974) with British children the functions that have been investigated because of their relationship with PRTV, are the use of TV for relaxation, for learning and for companionship.

Reeves proceeded to try to replicate Greenberg's findings, and found moderate support for the relationship between relaxation and PRTV, and some better support for the relationships between learning and companionship with PRTV. In this study we hypothesize that:

$H_7$: As the use of TV for relaxation increases, PRTV will increase.

$H_8$: As the use of TV for learning increases, PRTV will increase, and

$H_9$: As the use of TV for companionship increases, PRTV will increase.

Exposure to Television. Greenberg in his study of British children found that exposure correlated with PRTV ($r = .20$, see Reeves, 1974, p. 17). Greenberg (1972) also found that the frequency of watching shows which feature black people

in different roles is related to the perception of reality of those characterizations by children.

Reeves found that as exposure increased, PRTV increased consistently when using a general measure of exposure, although with less consistency when he used a specific measure of exposure for content categories (blacks, families, and police). In this study with Mexican children we expect accordingly that

$H_{10}$: As exposure to TV increases, PRTV will increase.

The Influence of Significant Others. In the sociological literature significant others are conceptually defined as "those persons who exercise major influence over the attitudes of individuals" (see Woelfel and Haller, 1971, p. 75). It has been consistently found that the influence of significant others is decisive in attitude formation and other behavioral aspects (Picou and Campbell, 1975; Duncan, Haller and Portes, 1968; Haller and Woelfel, 1972; Woelfel and Hernandez, 1972; etc.). This work has usually assumed a linear model of attitude formation (Woelfel, 1972 and Woelfel and Saltiel, 1975).

Reeves found that the information a child receives from significant others about the reality of television programming is positively related to the child's perceived reality of such content, at the three levels of abstraction that he studied. It can be argued against this finding that the influence of significant others was measured as perceived by the child. However, recent evidence indicates that children tend to only slightly underestimate the influence they receive from others (Woelfel, 1975). Given the above, it is to be expected that in the Mexican sample

$H_{11}$: The information a child receives from significant others about the reality of television programming, as perceived by the child, will be positively related to the child's perceived reality of that programming.

## THE EFFECTS OF PRTV ON AGGRESSIVE PREDISPOSITIONS

The present study will attempt to clarify the character of the relationship between PRTV violence and aggressive behavioral predispositions.

Atkin (1971) found partial support for the relationship of violence viewing to aggressive predispositions when mediated by the perception of the violent content as real. Feshbach (1972) conducted three experiments in order to find out, among other things, if children that were presented with a violent program labeled as real showed more subsequent aggression than children who were presented with a violent program labeled as fantasy. His expectations were corrobarated. Thomas and Tell (1974) found an increment of aggression for angered subjects who were told they watched a real scene of violence, as compared with subjects who were told they watched a fictional scene of violence and others who didn't watch any filmed scene at all. Wood (1974) in an exploratory experiment found a significant association between PRTV and hypothetical aggression.

Greenberg (1974b) in a study with British children, found a correlation of .16 ($p<.01$) between items such as "The shows on TV tell about life the way it really is," and "Sometimes a fight is a good way to settle an argument." This finding suggests one more time that the perception of TV violence as real may contribute to the display of aggressive predispositions and perhaps of actual anti-social behavior. To the extent that the media is considered to be a school for real life, one may expect in the Mexican sample that:

$H_{12}$: As the perception of TV violence as real increases, aggressive predispositions toward problem or conflict resolution will increase.

## METHODOLOGY

The data for this study were collected during the winter of 1975 from 300 children in two elementary schools in Mexico City. In order to maximize the differences among respondents, half the respondents were from very low socioeconomic backgrounds, and the other half from very high socioeconomic status families. Half of them were third graders, and the other half were sixth graders. There was a roughly equal number of boys and girls in each subdivision. Ages ranged from 7 to 16 years. The questionnaires* were administered to entire classrooms during regular class periods. The shortest time of administration was of 25 minutes for the 6th graders, high SES, and the longest was of one hour and 20 minutes for the 3rd graders, low SES.

### Variables

There were two dependent variables studied in this project: a) the perception of reality of TV by the child at three levels of abstraction, and b) aggressive predispositions towards problem resolution.

The independent variables considered here were: 1) real life experiences with television content; 2) functions and gratifications from TV; 3) exposure to television; 4) the influence of significant others; and 5) demographic variables (SES, grade in school, age, sex, and GPA).

### Dependent Measures

Perception of Reality of Television. PRTV was measured at three levels of abstraction: television in general, content areas on television, and specific television characters or behaviors. Since the questionnaire was administered in Spanish, the questions and scales used will be translated back for this presentation.

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*All scales were pretested for adaptability to the Mexican children.

PRTV in general was measured with the following items:

1. "People on TV shows are like people you know in real life."
2. "The same things that happen to people on TV shows can happen to people you know in real life."
3. "The places you see on TV shows are like the places you know in real life."

The three items intercorrelated significantly and they were summed to form an abstract PRTV index which ranged from three to nine.

For the second level of abstraction, questions were generated for three content areas* on television programming. The content PRTV items were:

1. "Families on TV shows are like families you know in real life."
2. "The Americans that appear on TV shows are like Americans you know in real life."
3. "Fights on TV shows are like the fights you have been involved in or you have seen in real life."

These content areas were used because of their availability on the Mexican television and because of their suitability for the test of the hypotheses generated. Since not all three items intercorrelated significantly, it was decided to study each content category separately.

The response categories accompanying these questions were the same ones used for the items in the abstract PRTV index: That's true, I don't know, and That's not true.

At the last level of abstraction PRTV was measured for six specific characters or behaviors on TV. Two of these characters or behaviors were included for each of the three content areas specified above.

The questions for specific families were:

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*The content areas used by Reeves were black people, policemen, and families.

1. "Do you think that the family in 'Hogar Dulce Hogar' is like the families you know in real life?"

2. "Do you think that the Partridge family is like the families you know in real life?"

The questions for specific Americans were:

1. "Do you think that Tony Blake 'The Magician' is like the Americans you know in real life?"

2. "Do you think that the children in 'Family Affair' are like American children in real life?"

And the questions for specific fights were:

1. "Do you think that the fights on 'Mission Impossible' are like the fights you have been in or you have seen in real life?"

2. "Do you think that the fights on 'Hawaii Five-O' are like the fights you have been in or you have seen in real life?"

The possible responses to the six questions were: yes, I don't know, and no. The shows were selected according to an exploratory questionnaire using as criteria exposure and suitability to the content areas. The average number of children who watched each of the nine shows was 209, or 77%* of the total number of respondents.

Aggressive Predispositions Towards Problem Resolution. This was the second dependent variable in this study. It was operationalized in two ways, the first being a measure of predispositions towards problem resolution, and the second a measure of self-report of involvement in fights.

The first operationalization was borrowed from Leifer and Roberts (1972), and adapted to the Mexican children after pretest. The items consist of situations in which the child may find himself in his everyday life, and several possible modes of conflict resolution are given to him to choose from. The situations that remained in the final set were as follows:

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*This figure is identical to Reeves'

1. "You are walking down the street. A child is mad at you. He comes and hits you. What do you do?"

2. "You see that somebody is stealing your sandwich. You catch him. What do you do?"

3. "You are waiting in line to drink water. Somebody comes and pushes you. What do you do?"

4. "Somebody is telling stories about you behind your back. You notice it. You see him after school. What do you do?"

5. "When you are leaving school you see two children hitting your best friend. What do you do?"

The responses that the children could indicate fell into either physical aggression, withdrawal, or denounce categories. The items were taken into consideration only when the physical aggression response was used.

Since all the items correlated significantly with each other, an index of physical aggressive predispositions was formed by adding the responses to all five items, and it ranged from 0 to 5. The second operationalization of aggressive predispositions was "How of ten do you get into fights?" and the response categories were many times, sometimes, almost never, and never. The correlation between the two measures was $r = .24$ ($p<.05$).

Independent Measures

Real-Life Experiences with TV Content. Two questions were generated for each of the three content areas. The questions with respect to real life experiences with families were:

1. "How often do you play with your friends in their homes?"

2. "How often do you talk to the families of your friends in their homes?"

For real life experiences with Americans the questions were:

3. "How often do you see Americans in real life?" (not on TV)

4. "How often do you talk to Americans?"

For real life experiences with fights the following questions were used:

5. "How often do you see people fighting in real life?" (not on TV)

6. "How often do you get into fights?"

In response, the children were to indicate: many times, sometimes, almost never and never. Each pair of items for each area of experience correlated significantly and an index of experience was formed for each pair of items by summing them.

It should be noted that item 6 is the same one utilized for the self-report of engagement in fights, and it was not correlated or otherwise analyzed, with itself or with an index containing it.

Functions and Gratifications From TV. Three items were used for measuring each of these uses or functions of television: relaxation, learning and companionship. For relaxation, the items used were:

1. "How often do you watch TV in order to be tranquil?"

2. "How often do you watch TV in order to calm down when you are in a temper?"

3. "How often do you watch TV because it's a nice way to rest?"

The items used for learning were:

4. "How often do you watch TV for finding out about the things that happen in the world?"

5. "How often do you watch TV in order to learn how to behave?"

6. "How often do you watch TV in order to learn things about yourself?"

For companionship the following are the items that were used:

7. "How often do you watch TV because it's like a real friend for you?"

8. "How often do you watch TV in order not to be alone?"

9. "How often do you watch TV when there is nobody to talk to or to play with?"

These items are adapted variations of the items used by Reeves and by Greenberg (1974). The possible responses were: always, many times, sometimes, and never. The three items for each of the functions intercorrelated significantly and an index was formed for each which could range from 3 to 12.

Exposure to TV. Exposure to TV was measured in two different ways. First, the children were asked to put a check next to the names of the shows they watched "every week or almost every week" on a list of 22 programs, which excluded the shows referred to in the reality measures. The mean number of shows checked was 14 with a standard deviation of 4.7.

The second measure of exposure was the shows in the content areas. The children were asked to indicate whether they watched each of the six shows almost every week, sometimes, or never. An index of specific exposure was formed to fit the abstract PRTV index, by adding up the scores and the resulting range was from 0 to 12. For comparability with each of the content areas three subindexes were created: one for families, one for Americans, and one for exposure to fights. The exposure items were also used individually for comparability with the PRTV of each of the shows.

The Influence of Significant Others. The composite influence of interpersonal sources on the perception of reality of the child was assessed with two measures: an approximate measure of interaction with others about specific TV characters, and the bias of the interactions about the reality of the characters. A child could mention interactions with all, some, or none of the following: friends, mother or father, and/or brothers or sisters. If the child reported interactions with at least one source, she/he was asked to report his average perception one whether he thought the source or sources believe that the character (or behavior) is like its real-life counterpart. The bias question could

be answered with a yes, I don't know, or no. The number of sources was multiplied by the bias to render an index of the influence of significant others that ranged from -3 to +3. Positive scores attest that the information the child receives is in favor of the reality of what she/he watches. Indexes were created to match the PRTV measures.

Demographics. The high SES children were characterized by the fact that their parents paid approximately $60 a month for tuition. The low SES children went to a public school where no tuition was paid. About ten percent of these children did not wear shoes, and the school was located in an industrial area of the city.

The GPA of the children was their average grade for the school year 1974-1975, as reported by the teacher in charge of each group of children. The school tests, on which the GPA is based, is uniform for all schools in the country.

The children were also requested to report their age and sex. Their grade in school was recorded.

## RESULTS

The results of this study will be presented in the order of the hypotheses proposed. This will be followed by the presentation of the results of a multivariate analysis of the data.

1. Real Life Experiences with TV Content. This hypothesis states a curvilinear type of relationship between PRTV and real life experiences with TV content. In order to test this hypothesis Eta correlation coefficients were computed and F tests for deviation from linearity obtained (for computing formulas, see Blalock Jr., 1972, p. 412). A relationship was considered to deviate significantly from linearity if an F value was significant at $p \leq .05$, and would then

warrant further examination through a scattergram. Since from all the relationships only one was found to significantly deviate from linearity, no further examination was done, and this hypothesis is consequently rejected.

Pearson correlation coefficients were also obtained for these two variables, but among ten correlations only three were statistically significant in the direction opposite to that hypothesized by Reeves: the more real life experiences with TV content, the less PRTV. With American and Mexican children, then, no consistent relationship has been found between reality perceptions of TV and their counterpart in real life.

2. The Level of Abstraction for the Referent on TV.* Children were asked to report their reality perceptions at three levels of abstraction: a content-free level, content areas, and specific characters or behaviors. The abstract PRTV index rendered a mean of 2.28, the average of the means for the content PRTV items was 2.29, and the average for the specific items was 1.96. The trend of the means is opposite to that found by Reeves with his American sample, and contrary to the hypothesis of this study. An analysis of variance repeated measures was conducted on the data and a significant F ratio was found. Scheffe tests were conducted for a-posteriori comparisons. The specific measures were found to be in the average significantly lower than the average of the content measures and the abstract PRTV index, there being no difference between these last two. For comparison purposes, the means of similar measures of PRTV used by Reeves and in this study are presented.

| | Mexican Children (Korzenny) | American Children (Reeves) |
|---|---|---|
| Abstract PRTV Index | 6.76* | 5.80 |
| Content PRTV Index | 6.87* | 6.71 |
| Specific PRTV Index | 5.88* | 7.17 |
| Content PRTV Families | 2.13 | 1.98 |
| PRTV of Families in the Partridge Family | 2.31 | 2.31 |

*Multiplied by three for comparability.

As the results discussed above indicate, the patterns of absolute means between the two studies are quite different. The mean obtained here for the abstract index most closely parallels what Reeves obtained for the specific PRTV index; the reverse is true for the specific PRTV index obtained here and Reeves' abstract PRTV index. The content index and the family content measures are very similar in absolute levels from the two studies, as is the specific family show reality measure.

Demographics

3. Socioeconomic Status (SES). Table 1 presents the t values found for the mean differences in PRTV between the high and low SES children. In order to confirm this hypothesis positive t values are required since the high SES children were expected to perceive less reality on TV than their counterparts.

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Table 1 About Here

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By examining the pattern of predicted significant findings, one can observe that the abstract PRTV index behaved as expected, as well as the items that dealt with PRTV of fights both in the content and in the specific categories for both shows. The results for content PRTV families and Americans, as well as the specific shows in those categories exhibit contradictory tendencies or trends contrary to those expected. In general, this hypothesis received partial support with Mexican children. Reeves' lack of support may be attributed to the homogeneity of his American sample.

4. Grade in School. Children in the sixth grades were expected to be able to discount fantasy representations more than the third graders. Seven out of ten t tests in Table 1 are significant in the hypothesized direction, and the

hypothesis can be said to have received support in general. An unexpected reversal was encountered for the abstract PRTV index. The content PRTV of Americans as well as the PRTV of Americans in the show "Family Affair" were not significantly different by grade in school. These results are very similar to those obtained by Reeves.

4'. Age. Negative correlation coefficients are required to confirm this hypothesis. In Table 1, nine coefficients are in the hypothesized direction and seven are statistically significant. The correlation between age and the abstract PRTV index is significant but in the direction opposite to that hypothesized. In general, the hypothesis is confirmed, and age and grade in school can be said to have behaved similarly in the prediction of PRTV.

5. Sex. Females were expected to perceive more reality on TV than males. However the results on Table 1 indicate that with one exception, content PRTV families, there are no differences between the two sexes. This finding is consistent across both the Mexican and the American samples.

6. GPA. As indicated on Table 1, five out of the ten correlations are significant in the direction of the hypothesis. The better the children do in school the less they perceived TV in general, content TV fights, and specific fights as well as the family in the show Hogar Dulce Hogar to be real. However, the higher the GPA of the child, the more he perceived the children in Family Affair to be like American children in real life. In sum, the hypothesis has received partial support and the findings are compatible with those of Reeves.

Functions and Gratifications From Television

The Pearson product moment correlations that test the hypotheses with respect to the functions that TV serves are all found in Table 1. Positive coefficients confirm the hypotheses proposed.

7. The Use of TV for Relaxation. Only three out of the ten correlations obtained are significant. In general, this hypothesis is rejected in favor of the null, and it can be said that as the use of TV for relaxation increased, PRTV did not change except in the cases of families in content areas, of the family in The Partridge Family, and in the case of the fights on Mission Impossible. Although the results are not very different from Reeves', he interpreted his results as being partial confirmation of the hypothesis, however it can be said that the Mexican and the American children were not very different in their appreciation of TV reality with respect to their use of the set for relaxation: it doesn't make much of a difference.

8. The Use of TV for Learning. Seven positive significant correlations confirm this hypothesis in general for every measure of PRTV except those items related to the reality of Americans on TV which show no relationship with the use of TV for learning. The more the child watches TV for learning, the more likely he is to perceive TV in general, families and fights, both in content areas and with respect to specific characters or behaviors, as realistic. Similar support was found by Reeves with his U. S. sample.

9. The Use of TV for Companionship. Five out of the ten coefficients are significant and two more are very close to being statistically significant. The hypothesis is considered to be at least partially confirmed. Notably, as in the case of learning, content PRTV of Americans and the PRTV of Americans in two shows, exhibit little or no relationship with companionship. Also specific PRTV of families in Hogar Dulce Hogar, and specific PRTV of fights on Mission Impossible show little or no relationship with the use of TV for companionship.

The use of TV for companionship was related to the perception of TV in general as real, with the PRTV of families and fights in content areas, and

the PRTV of families and fights in The Partridge Family and in Hawaii Five-O, respectively. These results are also consistent across the American and Mexican samples.

10. Exposure. Under the heading of "Exposure" the correlation coefficients that test the hypothesis are presented in Table 1. There were two measures of exposure used--one general consisting of 22 shows, and the other specific consisting of shows in the content areas. For the general measure of exposure, five out of the ten correlations were found to be statistically significant. It is to be noted that the measure of exposure to 22 shows is consistent in the prediction of the PRTV of fights, since the correlations with content PRTV fights and with the PRTV of fights in Mission Impossible and in Hawaii Five-O were all significant. With respect to families, the same can be said with the exception of the PRTV of The Partridge Family.

In the case of the measures of exposure to specific shows in the content areas, out of the ten correlations three were found to be significant with: the PRTV of families in the content area, the PRTV of families in The Partridge Family, and with the PRTV of Americans in Family Affair.

Across the two measures of exposure, only the relationship with the PRTV of families in the content area seems to hold. In all other cases the general index of exposure to 22 shows and the measures of specific exposure do not agree in their association with PRTV.

The hypothesis that the more the child watches TV the more he perceives it to be real is partially supported in the case of the general exposure index, and rejected in the case of the specific measures of exposure to the six shows in the content areas. The results with respect to the general exposure index are congruent with Reeves', but not so with respect to the specific measures which held for the American children but not for the Mexican ones.

11. The Influence of Significant Others (ISO). Table 1 contains zero-order correlations that test the prediction that as the amount of influence by significant others with respect to the reality of TV increases, the PRTV of the child will increase.

Seven of the ten correlations are significant and generally quite high in the predicted direction. The correlation of ISO about families with content PRTV families fell short of significance. The index of all ISO when correlated with the abstract PRTV index yielded an insignificant coefficient. Finally, the index of the addition of the ISO of the two family shows showed no relationship with the PRTV of families in the content area. These results are remarkably similar to those found with the American sample. At the specific level, the relationships were the highest found in the study, while at the content and abstract levels the results were unimpressive. The congruency of both studies is highly suggestive, but one must bear in mind that in neither study any attempt was made to check the children's perceptions of the influence received against the report of their sources of interpersonal influence. The hypothesis is considered to be supported.

12. The Effect of Perceiving Television Violence as Real on Aggressive Behavioral Predispositions. In order to test this hypothesis the following independent variables were considered: content PRTV fights, and PRTV fights in two specific shows, namely, Mission Impossible and Hawaii Five-O. The dependent variables were the index of physical aggressive predispositions toward problem resolution, and the self-report of the frequency of the child's engagement in physical fights.

To test this hypothesis, zero-order correlations were computed between the independent and the dependent variables. The associations found ranged from -.16

to .11. The only significant correlation was between the index of physical aggressive predispositions and the PRTV of Hawaii Five-O ($r = -.16$, $p=.05$), but it was in the opposite direction to that anticipated. When the demographic variables were statistically controlled for, the correlation dropped from -.16 to -.09 and became non-significant. When the same control was carried out for the rest of the relationships, they remained low and non-significant.

When considering PRTV as an intervening variable between exposure to violence on TV and aggressive predispositions, conditional zero-order correlations were computed. All possible combinations between the measures of exposure with those of aggressive predispositions by PRTV of fight were tried, and no consistent pattern emerged. An equal number of significant correlations was found between exposure and aggressive predispositions at all three levels of the measures of PRTV: Not true, don't know, and true. Eight correlation coefficients were obtained at each level of PRTV, and three coefficients were significant at each level.

The hypothesis that as PRTV of violence increases, aggressive predispositions will increase is rejected in favor of the null, in this non-replicative part of the study.

Multivariate Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was used in order to identify key predictors of the different PRTV measures. The findings are summarized in Table 2.

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Table 2 About Here

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For the abstract and the content PRTV measures, the multiple correlations accounted for an average of about 10% of the variance. This is almost the same

average found with the American sample. The amount of variance accounted for in the specific PRTV measures for individual shows was of about one fourth. This result is also similar to Reeves', although his specific measures were slightly better accounted for (about one third of the total variance).

The predictor variables that account for most of the variance in the different PRTV measures in a persistent fashion are: 1) the influence of significant others, 2) grade in school and age, and to a lesser extent the 3) GPA of the children, and 4) the use of TV for companionship.

Reeves, with his U.S. sample found that the significant contributors that accounted for most of the variance were: interpersonal influence, age, general exposure to TV, and companionship.

Across the Mexican and American studies, the influence of significant others, grade in school, and the use of TV for companionship are persistent in enabling the prediction of PRTV to some extent, with a reduced number of variables. Most of the other independent variables could be deleted without much loss in predictive power.

## DISCUSSION

The data in this study has contributed to the replicative validation of the determinants of the perception of reality of television (PRTV) in a different cultural setting. It is of definite interest to observe the regularity of the findings between a U.S. sample of children and a Mexican one. The differences found are as important as the similarities, and they deserve special consideration since they may throw some light on the relationships between culture and information processing of children.

The innovative part of this study, which attempted to encounter a relationship between the perception of reality of television violence by children and aggressive behavioral predispositions remained inconclusive.

Table 3 summarizes the regularities and dissimilarities between the Mexican and U.S. studies. Two variables consistently showed no association between themselves and PRTV, namely real life experiences with TV content and sex. The most plausible explanation for the lack of a consistent relationship between real life experiences with TV content and PRTV may be the one offered by Reeves and by Greenberg and Reeves (1974, p. 22), that "the standard of judgment used may well be the fictional presentation, against which the true-to-life one is being weighed." Consequently, the type of information that the child uses as a standard for comparison, whether symbolic or "real" experiences, should be determined before making specific predictions with regard to the expected behavior of the relationship between real life experiences and TV representations. Also, some caution should be exercised in interpreting results derived from two questionnaire items that might not have tapped the wide range of experiences of the child.

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Table 3 About Here

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With respect to sex, it is specially noticeable that no differences were found in two different cultures with regard to the same, or very similar, measures of PRTV. The explanation for this occurrence may be that socialization practices for the sexes, and across the two cultures, do not differentially affect the way in which children evaluate the reality of TV programming, at least up to the highest age of children studied here. As infants their treatment and the rules under which they are raised may not substantially differ. Adolescents or adults may still show differences in PRTV according to their sex, since the social climate surrounding them is expected to be more definitively different, especially in a country like Mexico. For example, the

evaluation of the reality of soap-operas by adolescent or adult males and females is expected to differ.

Several incongruencies were found between the two studies. Marked differences were observed for the relationship of PRTV with the level of abstraction for the referent of television, SES, intelligence, the use of television for relaxation, and specific exposure.

Reeves found that as the referent for television went from the abstract to the more concrete, PRTV increased. In this study the relationship not only did not hold but some reversal was observed. The more concrete the referent the less PRTV, with the two highest levels of abstraction showing no difference between themselves. This difference of findings may well be a function of the shows inquired about, the referents of concern (families, Americans, and fights), or the cultural background of the respondents, or a combination of these factors.

Possibly, the lack of difference between the two higher levels of abstraction can be attributed to the fact that they were defined a priori by the researcher. In trying to interpret the differences in results, we observe that the specific shows inquired about were all with one exception of foreign origin to the Mexican children. These specific shows might have been evaluated with respect to the Mexican television in general, which in the average may contain more elements that the Mexican children can relate to. So at a more abstract level the Mexican children were more likely to endorse the abstract and content PRTV items to a greater extent.

SES in the present study did make a difference with respect to the perceptions of reality of TV programming, contrary to Reeves' lack of differences, but consistent with past research. The explanation for this had already been offered by Reeves. He suspected that lack of differences was due to the absen-

of well differentiated subsamples with respect to socioeconomic status in his sample. The subsamples in the Mexican study were well differentiated, they actually represented extremes along the continuum of social class.

It was in general found that the better the children did in school, the more they tended to consider that TV does not reflect real life. Given the typical high association between GPA and intelligence we can say that this finding is contrary to the U.S. one, which although in the hypothesized direction, was not significant. Reeves' results can be explained by the fact that he could only gather IQ scores for half of his sample, where there were no scores for the oldest children. Children that are better equipped intellectually tend to discount as fantasy what they watch in TV fiction. At this point I should mention a result out of the realm of this study but of potential importance and concern: the correlation coefficient between GPA and SES was .54 ($p < .001$).

For the relationship between the function of relaxation of TV and PRTV, support was found with the U.S. sample but not with the Mexican one. It seems to be that this function is an underlying one that accompanies all other reasons for watching television, and it becomes one seemingly obvious motive for watching television as a socially acceptable response, in the case of the Mexican sample. In fact, in this study, the standard deviation for the distribution of this function was the lowest of all three functions investigated (2.07 vs. 2.21 and 2.31).

In the case of specific exposure, the fact that Reeves used three shows in each content area as compared to two in this study, may explain the different results to some extent. He tapped a wider range of exposure to TV, and consequently his measure would be expected to vary more. Specific exposure

in the case of the Mexican children might not have reflected the kind of symbolic experience that the children use for evaluating the reality of a show or a set of them, as compared with a larger set of programs.

The fact that the influence of significant others was one of the best predictors, consistently across both studies, deserves further consideration. The results are quite straightforward if in fact the perception of the ISO by the child reflects the actual influence exercised over him. The issue that remains to be resolved is whether the children in a projective act do reflect the influence of their significant others to be consistent with their own views. If such is the case, these results may not be meaningful. However, if the children do try to estimate the influence they receive instead of simply projecting their own perceptions, we may have an even more powerful tool than the direct report of significant others with respect to their influence over a child. The way we perceive the messages is what theoretically should influence behavior, and not the message as intended by the source.

The irregularities across both studies, and within the studies are suggestive. It may prove more fruitful to study individual types of referents (e.g., families, Americans, fights, etc.) in individual shows with respect to PRTV, rather than speak of PRTV too generally. The dimensions that a child uses for evaluating the reality of TV may vary from show to show. The referent of relevance in talking about PRTV can in its own right constitute the unit of analysis, for example, the PRTV of violence only, and what is that makes it predictable from certain independent variables. Some unique characteristics may be uncovered which may then serve for generating a theory with a stronger explanatory power. The time dimension (Gordon, 1973), the context of the violence, the identification of the child with a character, etc., or a combination of the above may

explain marked differences in prediction. Global approaches like this one, may be profitable in an exploratory sense since some of the variance has been explained by significant contributors (average = 19%). However, the study of the determinants of more specific PRTV issues, in detail, can be the best follow-up.

For the non-replicative part of this study, cultural differences may account for the lack of relationship between PRTV and aggressive predispositions.

We don't know to what extent the Mexican culture approves of certain types of aggressive acts in comparison to Anglo-Saxon cultures. However, we may expect more tolerance for certain aggressive acts. The types of behavior attempted to be tapped in this study may simply not represent anti-social acts, and consequently find that the children, regardless of their PRTV of violence, manifest what we call aggressive predispositions. Perhaps the use of more extreme aggressive options might have better differentiated those children who believe that TV violence is real. This is assuming that they would answer according to their true predispositions. The actual observation of the aggressive behavior of the children, as defined in their own culture, might have been the best measure.

## CONCLUSION

The relative success achieved in this study in predicting the perception of reality of television is emphasized, since a replication in a different culture has given generality to some of the findings.

The incongruencies found suggest that more specific attempts be made to study PRTV. Concentrated efforts in one specific type of show, paying closer attention to other possible intervening variables that may mediate PRTV could be fruitful, e.g., identification with a character.

Future endeavors should attempt to tap cultural variables that may explain the differences and similarities in the predictability of PRTV, or any other

variable for that matter. This study definitely suffered from the lack of such information.

Closer scrutiny of the kinds of experiences that a child has in his environment may lead to a better predictability of the way in which the child interprets what he sees on the tube. The cumulative effect of continuous exposure to television may also determine how new symbolic information is processed. One kind of experience that the child undergoes is the influence of his significant others. In this study, such influence, as reported by the child has shown to be a strong determinant of the way in which the child decodes the messages that the media offers. More definite evidence is needed that shows whether such influence, as reported by the child or by the significant others themselves, is in effect a principal determinant. If this is the case, parents and teachers would be the targets of attention by those who are in charge of setting policy priorities.

The determination of the dimensions on which children evaluate the reality of television is a further topic for consideration. Is reality evaluated along a time dimension? An effectiveness one? Or is reality on television evaluated at all, as a spontaneous activity of the child?

If the child does not spontaneously evaluate the reality or make believe of what he sees, then he may not use such information for attitude formation and for subsequent behavior.

In this study, no consistent evidence was found for a relationship between the perception of reality of TV violence and aggressive predispositions. It may be in fact that PRTV is not an issue of consideration by the child, or it may be that other variables should be explored which may interact with it for rendering the behavioral effects we hypothesized. Justification may be one such variable. If what is seen on TV is not only real, but justified, then it may be acceptable for imitation.

Other effects of PRTV should be explored. Is helping behavior enhanced when helping on TV is perceived to be realistic? Do the sex roles portrayed on television, when perceived as real, promote stereotyping of the behavior of, for example, males and females? Is the male suppose to be a "macho?" Is TV contributing to a "male" or "female" behavior, mediated perhaps by PRTV? Boys and girls may perceive TV to be equally real. However, they may learn different things, according to the sex of the characters.

The extent to which exposure in itself contributes to aggressive or anti-social behavior is still to be analyzed with this Mexican sample. Past research in the U.S. has shown that a relationship does exist between exposure and attitudes or behavior.

PRTV, as well as exposure, may have cumulative effects, or effects over time. If the same children in this study could be given a similar questionnaire in a year or two, or when they are out of school, some more evidence could be found that would confirm or disconfirm the findings of this study. It may well be that what the children perceive to be real in their early years contributes to how they behave later in life. The same applies to mere exposure. Is exposure to violence during childhood a determinant of adult anti-social behavior?

Hopefully, the deficiencies of this study will be overcome in subsequent endeavors, as suggested above, or in other forms, and the evidence encountered in this study serve towards the formation of more solid human knowledge of the behavior of human beings. The perception of reality of television and its possible effects on the behavior of the receivers is by no means a concluded research endeavor, and the merit of replications across cultures has been demonstrated here, by the discovery of regularities and irregularities across political and language boundaries.

Table 1. t tests and Pearson correlation coefficients for PRTV measures by demographics, functions and gratifications, exposure, and the influence of significant others.

| PRTV MEASURES | DEMOGRAPHICS | | | | | FUNCTIONS | | | EXPOSURE | | Influence of Significant Others |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SES t value | Grade in School t value | AGE r | SEX t value | GPA r | Relaxation r | Learning r | Companionship r | General Exposure 22 shows r | Specific Exposure r | r |
| Abstract PRTV index | 2.88* | -2.49 | .17 | -1.36 | -.16* | .03 | .14* | .17* | .06 | .03 | .01 |
| Content PRTV families | -.40 | 2.27* | -.15* | -1.43* | -.04 | .14* | .21* | .22* | .13* | .11* | .11 |
| Content PRTV Americans | -2.04 | .10 | -.10 | .86 | .02 | .02 | -.07 | .06 | -.02 | .08 | .07 |
| Content PRTV fights | 3.80* | 3.04* | -.10 | .71 | -.27* | .08 | .29* | .19* | .13* | .09 | .19* |
| Specific PRTV families in: | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Hogar Dulce Hogar | 3.15* | 4.64* | -.14* | 1.03 | -.29* | .08 | .18* | .09 | .24* | .05 | .36* |
| The Partridge Family | -1.93 | 3.52* | -.24* | -.99 | -.01 | .19* | .24* | .31* | .05 | .12* | .39* |
| Specific PRTV Americans in: | | | | | | | | | | | |
| The Magician | -2.37 | 2.47* | -.17* | .61 | -.02 | .05 | -.02 | .06 | .03 | .08 | .44* |
| Family Affair | -5.91 | .49 | -.17* | -1.09 | .21 | .04 | -.09 | .11 | -.05 | .13* | .34* |
| Specific PRTV fights in: | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mission Impossible | 1.56* | 3.85* | -.20* | 1.02 | -.15* | .14* | .12* | .10 | .13* | -.06 | .34* |
| Hawaii Five-O | 1.93* | 3.33* | -.13* | -1.20 | -.19* | .11 | .13* | .14* | .15* | .02 | .43* |

* p ≤ .05, in the hypothesized direction.

Table 2

MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF PRTV

| | Multiple Correlations | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | All Variables in the Equation | Step-wise Addition* | Significant Betas** |
| Abstract PRTV index | .35 | .30 | Age, Use of TV for Companionship, Grade in school, SES |
| Content PRTV families | .30 | .22 | Use of TV for companionship, ISO*** |
| Content PRTV Americans | .21 | - | |
| Content PRTV fights | .41 | .34 | Use of TV for learning, GPA |
| Specific PRTV families in: | | | |
| Hogar Dulce Hogar | .51 | .49 | Age, ISO, GPA, Grade in school |
| The Partridge Family | .50 | .48 | Age, Use of TV for companionship, ISO, Grade in school |
| Specific PRTV Americans in: | | | |
| The Magician | .53 | .50 | Age, ISO, Grade in school, Real life experiences |
| Family Affair | .55 | .53 | ISO, Real life experiences, SES |
| Specific PRTV fights in: | | | |
| Mission Impossible | .48 | .43 | Age, ISO, Grade in school |
| Hawaii Five-O | .51 | .49 | Age, ISO, Grade in school, GPA |

* Until the last significant contributor was added.
** Standardized partial regression coefficients.
*** Influence of significant others.

Table 3. Similarities and dissimilarities between the findings of the study with American children and the one with Mexican children in predicting the perception of reality of television.

| U.S. | Mexico |
|---|---|
| **Positive Associations:** | |
| Use of TV for | Use of TV for |
| relaxation | |
| learning | learning |
| companionship* | companionship* |
| General exposure* | General exposure |
| Specific exposure | |
| Influence of significant others* | Influence of significant others* |
| | Level of abstraction for the referent on television |
| **Negative Associations:** | |
| Level of abstraction for the referent on television | |
| Age* | Age and grade in school* |
| | Grade point average* |
| | Socio-economic status |
| **No Association:** | |
| Real life experiences with television content | Real life experiences with television content |
| Sex | Sex |
| I.Q. | |
| Socio-economic status | The use of TV for relaxation |
| | Specific exposure |

* stands for significant standardized partial regression coefficients ($p \leq .05$) that were very or somewhat consistent in predicting PRTV according to the multiple regression analysis conducted on the data. These are the contributors that in conjunction accounted for most of the variance explained by all the variables included in the regression equations.

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